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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DJIBOUTI 000854

AIDAC  
SIPDIS

USAID/DCHA FOR MHESS  
DCHA/OFDA FOR KLUU, ACONVERY, KCHANNELL  
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SUBJECT: DISASTER DECLARATION DJIBOUTI 2009

REF: DJIBOUTI 473

11. SUMMARY. Several years of continuous drought, lack of social protection, and high food prices have eroded the livelihood and food security situation of pastoralist and urban poor households in Djibouti, as evidenced by high malnutrition rates country-wide (reaching 25-34 percent in some areas). The humanitarian situation is beyond the capacity of the Government of Djibouti to manage, the Government will accept humanitarian assistance, and it is in the interest of the USG to provide it. Ambassador Swan therefore re-declares that a humanitarian emergency exists in Djibouti for FY 2009 and requests continued humanitarian resources from USAID. END SUMMARY.

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BACKGROUND  
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12. Djibouti, with a population of at least 600,000, struggles with acute food insecurity, exacerbated by the global food price crisis, drought, and lack of social safety-nets for more than half its population, according to the Famine Early Warning System Network (FEWSNET). A low-income, food-deficit country, Djibouti ranks 154 of 177 on the UN Human Development Index, with approximately 75 percent of the population living in relative poverty.

13. Drought has continued in Djibouti for more than four successive rainy seasons, which has stifled pasture regeneration critical to support livestock, the main source of livelihood for pastoralists. According to FEWSNET, between 50 and 70 percent of Djibouti's domestic livestock has perished, due to lack of water and pasture, and those that remain are too weak to travel the long distances to markets. Water supply is limited, and what is available is not fit for human or animal consumption.

14. Food access for poor households in most pastoral areas is limited, especially in the northwest and southeast pastoral livelihood zones. In response to rising food insecurity, a rural exodus to urban areas is increasing, as pastoral families facing asset depletion and destitution migrate in search of casual labor employment.

15. In urban areas, poor households also face critical food insecurity. Food price increases have raised the cost of the minimum food basket by 65 percent. Poor urban households receive about a quarter of their daily food needs from neighbors and

relatives. However, the purchasing power of the middle class has eroded significantly in recent months, and donations to poor households have declined.

¶6. In late 2007, the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) conducted a national nutrition survey which identified an overall global acute malnutrition (GAM) rate of 16.5 percent and severe acute malnutrition (SAM) rate of 2.4 percent--both above the World Health Organization (WHO) emergency threshold. The northwest pastoral livelihood zone is the most seriously affected, with a GAM of 24.8 percent and a SAM of 3.5 percent. In mid-October, the District Hospital in Obock reported a GAM rate for the region of 34 percent. UNICEF estimates that 25,000 children below five require nutritional assistance throughout the country. A disaster declaration in May 2008 (reftel) responded to an appeal by the Government of Djibouti for humanitarian and food aid assistance.

¶7. Although international oil prices have declined in recent weeks, staple food prices remain high, and casual labor opportunities have not improved. Poor pastoralist and urban households will continue to need food aid and livelihood assistance. MOH- and UNICEF-supported supplemental and therapeutic feeding programs continue to expand to meet the high demand. The October to February rains are projected to be normal to below-normal, and while they may lead to a slight improvement in water and pasture conditions, they will be insufficient for the regeneration of pastoral grazing areas which will remain highly to extremely food insecure. This situation will not have a positive, immediate impact on the food security of livestock-dependent households. Both urban and pastoral household food security and nutritional status will continue to deteriorate.

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DISASTER DECLARATION  
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¶8. In light of the current and projected humanitarian needs in Djibouti for FY 2009, Ambassador Swan hereby declares that a humanitarian emergency related to drought and food insecurity exists, and that it is in the interest of the U.S. Government to respond. The emergency is beyond the capacity of the Government of Djibouti to manage, and it will accept donor assistance. USG humanitarian resources are therefore requested to aid needy Djiboutians in FY 2009.

SWAN